



# & Workers' Liberty Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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# MARCH FOR THE NHS

Hospitals across the country continue to buckle under the stress of winter-related conditions — persistent cold weather and a nasty strain of influenza. But the responsibility for this crisis must lie with the government.

Further evidence of the danger patients face this winter were highlighted by the increased ambulance response times for even the patients with the most serious conditions — those waiting with conditions such as heart attacks and strokes — for whom every minute is vital.

Emergency Medicine Consultants from 68 hospitals have written to the Theresa May stating the risks to patient safety are “intolerable” and that patients are dying in hospital corridors waiting to be seen by overstretched doctors and nurses.

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**Saturday 3 February**

**Assemble noon, Gower Street, London**



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### Tunisia protests re-emerge



Protests in Tunisia re-emerge with students and jobless people angry about price rises.

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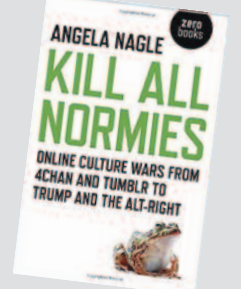
### Iranian workers strike



Strikes spread in Iran as opposition to the regime continues.

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### Documenting the alt-right



Solidarity reviews *Kill All Normies* by Angela Nagle.

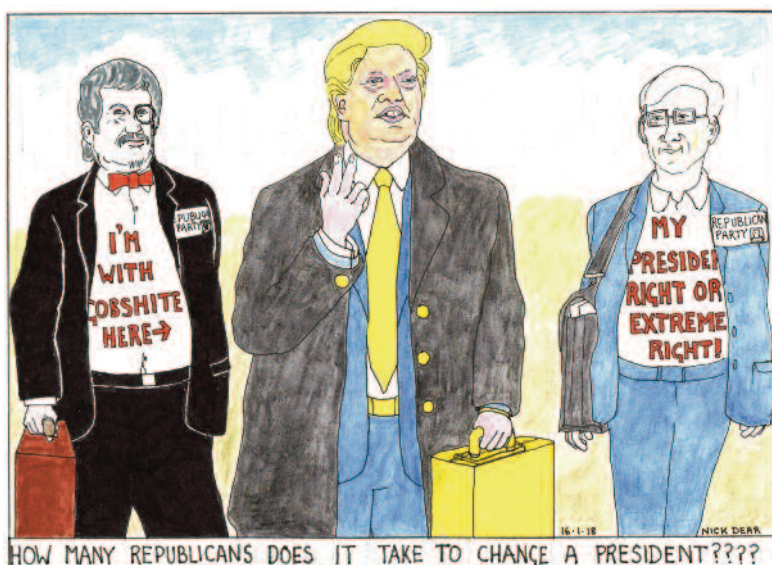
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## Join Labour!

Chris Williamson,  
local government,  
and council tax hikes

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## Cyrille Regis: 1958-2018

By Matthew Thompson

**The former footballer Cyrille Regis has died suddenly at the age of 59 after a heart attack.**

Cyrille was one of the black players who broke through into the game at the top level in England in the late 70s and early 80's. They overcame appalling racism which was then, sadly, often regarded by fans and managers alike as just harmless banter, to be brushed off as something "normal" and to be expected.

Cyrille was one of the so-called "Three Degrees" of black players signed by West Bromwich Albion along with the late Laurie Cunningham and Brendan Batson. They were managed for a time by Ron Atkinson, someone who has had his own issues with racism (albeit not, if what his former charges say is true, with his own black players).

Although it was more vocal and violent in the "terrace wars" between hooligan "firms" (many of whom had links to the far right), those chants and insults were of a piece with racism in society in general. Racism was also common the streets, pubs and workplaces to which black people returned after matches (if indeed they had been brave enough to attend them in the first place). It was also common in the TV comedies of the era, such as 'Till Death Do Us Part', with its oft-quoted bigot Alf Garnett, and the awful 'Love Thy Neighbour', about a white couple



living next door to a black one.

The West Midlands was no exception to this. Immigrants from the Caribbean and Indian sub-continent who had come to work in its foundries and car factories in the 50s and 60s had experienced a racist backlash from the start. This was epitomised by the notorious "Rivers of Blood" speech of 1968 in which Enoch Powell, Tory MP for Wolverhampton South West, fulminated against their arrival. The decline of those industries in the 70s and 80s led to white working-class frustrations which expressed themselves politically in the electoral rise of the street-fighting fascists of the National Front, which gained more than eight per cent of the vote at a 1977 by-election in Powell's birthplace of Stetchford.

**Above all, though, Cyrille Regis should be remembered for his sublime footballing talent.**

## Tory hypocrisy on free speech

By Ben Tausz

**On 26 December the Universities Minister Jo Johnson announced plans that he claims will protect free speech on campuses, including potential fines on universities.**

This is the conservative right's latest broadside against student movement "no platform" policies.

We disagree with the ways "no platform" policies have been applied by some on the left. A legitimate self-defence tactic against organised, physically violent groups such as fascists has, in some cases, been overstretched in ways that are both futile and undemocratic.

But the government's move is cynical nonsense. We argue to change no-platform policies democratically. This sort of interference in unions violates our freedom to organise: it's for members, not the government, to decide on their unions' political activities.

The hypocrisy runs still deeper. By far the biggest restrictions on free speech and political rights on campuses come from the state and managers. While the government rails against "ban-happy" leftists, it forces universities to impose mountains of bureaucracy that hassle and obstruct students who want to invite speakers and organise discussions. This is supposedly to ensure bigots don't get a platform! The difference? The speakers targeted by the government are disproportionately Muslims. Whether the Tories think you deserve the right to air "controversial" views seems to depend mainly on your religion and the colour of your skin (a privately-educated accent also helps).

Beyond this, discriminatory Prevent policies create a chilling effect against muslim students and radical activists; marketising reforms suffocate academic freedom; decades of anti-union laws infringe the democratic rights of student and trade unions; and authoritarian college and university managers crack down on simple things like political stalls and posters while enacting vicious intimidation and victimisation against student and trade union campaigners.

Bosses claiming to be protecting open debate have interfered extensively in student and staff-organ-



The Berkeley free speech movement 1964-65

ised events: for instance, barring left-wingers from holding meetings unless they accept right-wing speakers and management-appointed chairs, for "balance". And self-styled champions of liberty rail against left-wing campaigners who have the nerve to organise demonstrations against what they have to say: the right to speak is re-cast as the right not to face criticism or protest.

The left's shortcomings on the issue must not blind anyone to the reality that the right-wing, the state

and the ruling class are not serious or consistent champions of free speech. Every advance of political freedom in history has been secured through struggle: from below and from the left. Conservatives have latched onto no-platforming as a convenient excuse to attack leftists and deflect criticism and protest against their bigotries.

**It's up to us to fight off their cynical opportunism and build a real campaign to defend and extend political freedoms.**



## Austrian protests against far-right coalition

**On Saturday 13 January, tens of thousands of people braved pouring rain and cold to demonstrate in Vienna against the new conservative-far right coalition government, one of Austria's largest demonstrations in recent times. The police estimated participation at 20,000; organisers had it at 70,000.**

Socialists from the Revolutionary Socialist Organisation and the left-wing coalition Aufbruch marched alongside school students, refugee organisations and the anti-fascist pensioners' group "Omas Gegen Rechts". Crowds chanted "long live international solidarity" and "Austria will not be conquered by fascists". 13 January was the day that President Alexander van der Bellen approved the conservative People's Party's plan for a coalition with the far-right Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ).

**The coalition came about after the previous conservative-social democrat coalition fell apart in May. The far-right FPÖ under Heinz-Christian Strache will be given responsibility for foreign, interior and defence ministries.**

## Westminster sexual harassment report falls short, say staff and MPs

By Gemma Short

**A delayed report into tackling sexual harassment in Westminster will be debated by MPs on Tuesday 16 January (as *Solidarity* goes to press).**

Proposals from the report, which was due to be published before Christmas but was delayed, have been leaked. The proposals leaked include establishing an independent helpline and appointing a spe-

cialist to investigate allegations independently. The report apparently mentions sanctions but suggests that in the short term these would only include making apologies or being sent to training — concluding that new legislation would be needed for other sanctions to be applied.

On 9 January it was announced that two new clauses had been added to the ministerial code of conduct as well. One is the so-

called "Priti Patel clause" and not to do with sexual harassment. The other has been dubbed the "Damian Green clause" says that ministers must be "professional" in all their dealings and treat all people with "consideration and respect", and that they risk losing their jobs for any "inappropriate behaviour", "wherever it takes place".

At the time of the majority of the revelations in November 2017, a

significant number of MPs were accused. A spreadsheet compiled by Tory whips detailing the sexual conduct of 36 Tory MPs had also been leaked to the press. A very small number of these allegations have resulted in action being taken. Some, like those against Kelvin Hopkins MP, are still being investigated. Largely they have been quietly swept under the carpet.

In a statement the Unite the Union Parliamentary Branch said

of the working group's initial proposals that "the progress so far is insufficient to end the culture of bullying and sexual harassment that we are all too aware exists within our working environment."

**"It is our particular concern that staff reporting sexual harassment have still not been given access to an Independent Sexual Violence Advocate, which has instead been flagged up as a long term aspiration."**



# Carillion bosses walk away with millions

Continued from page 12

As late as last May, Carillion boss Richard Howson declared that the company had made “an encouraging start to the year”, with “increased revenue visibility”.

The accountants KPMG pocketed their ample fees and smilingly confirmed his story. Within a couple of months Howson evidently recognised that the gig was up.

He resigned, having gained £1.5 million in pay and bonuses for 2016. He got a deal saying he would still be paid his £660,000 base salary until October 2018, and the company changed its rules to guarantee such payments to ex-bosses in all circumstances short of legally-proven gross misconduct. Howson's successor Keith Cochrane, and former finance chiefs Richard Adam and Zafar Khan, have similar deals.

Even if Howson, Adam, and Khan will now fail to get their future promised payments, Howson

has already had £100,000 or so of his pay-out.

Carillion bosses have put it into “compulsory liquidation”. Usually bankrupt companies go into “administration”, where an outside official takes control, sells off some assets, negotiates with the creditors, and tries to refloat the company, usually chopping jobs and demanding wage and pension concessions from the remaining workers.

## LIQUIDATION

**Compulsory liquidation is different: the outside official, the Official Receiver, has no remit but to sell off assets, wind up operations, and pay the creditors whatever fraction can be raised of what's due to them.**

The Carillion shareholders who failed to pocket their fat dividends from the good years and walk away in time have already lost everything, so nationalising Carillion without compensating them is of little consequence.

Long periods of public-service cuts put pressure on firms like Carillion. In those periods, the bosses turn them into a sort of “Ponzi scheme” to keep the flow of bonuses and dividends going.

As the Financial Times explained, Carillion “had, in effect, become a lawful sort of Ponzi scheme — using new or expected revenues to cover more pressing demands for payment”. The company took out more loans, wrote new future contract revenues into its books to back up those loans, stretched its delays in paying suppliers, and kept on claiming profitability and making big pay-outs. According to former Lib-Dem pensions minister Steve Webb, Carillion's dividend pay-out “increased in each of the 16 years since the formation of the company”.

The Labour front bench's statement on Carillion was disappointingly weak: “It has been clear for months that Carillion has been in difficulty but the Government has continued to hand over contracts to



the company even after profits warnings were issued.

“Jobs and public services are now at risk because the Tories were blinded by their commitment to a failing ideological project of introducing the profit motive into taxpayer-funded services.

“Labour urges the Government

to stand ready to intervene and bring these crucial public sector contracts back in-house in order to protect Carillion's employees, pension holders and British taxpayers”.

**It's not just Carillion. Bring all the big contracted-out operations back in-house!**

## “Hostile environment” for migrants

By Charlotte Zalens

**A 61 year-old woman who was threatened with, deportation and detained in Yarl's Wood detention centre despite having lived and worked in the UK for 50 years has won official leave to remain in the country.**

Paulette Wilson came to the UK from Jamaica with her family when she was 10 years old. She has not visited Jamaica since then, and has no relatives there, but despite this was taken to Heathrow for deportation to Jamaica in October. Paulette has also been denied to benefits, health care or permission to work for two and a half years.

Paulette is one of a number of long-settled migrants who found out they did not have the UK citizenship they thought they had when they were suddenly and brutally pursued by the Home Office as part of Theresa May's “hostile environment” for migrants launched in 2012. Some had previously held passports, entering and exiting the country with no issue. Many are suddenly detained when trying to renew passports or access other state services.

The Legal Action Group estimates that this may affect as many as 10,000 people who arrived in the UK as children and have lived and worked here since effected.



**The 1971 Immigration Act supposedly gave people who had already settled in Britain indefinite leave to remain, however many struggle to provide proof that they arrived in the UK in the 60s.**

## The synthesising of outrage on social media

By Martin Thomas

**“Steve Bartlett, the company's 25-year-old co-founder, regularly boasts to potential clients that he can make any hashtag trend on Twitter before he's finished his presentation”.**

The Observer (14 January) reported on how Bartlett and his now multi-million pound company Social Chain shape how marketing is done on social media

The report also sheds light on the low quality and corrupting effect of political argument carried out on social media — how it smothers real debate and investigation, and replaces it by constant churning of scandal and flame-warring.

“People share feelings, not infor-

mation” online, says Hannah Anderson, the company's media director. “The stronger the emotion that a Facebook post, tweet or Instagram story elicits, the further it will be carried by the churning waves of algorithm... Low-arousal emotions such as contentment and relaxation are useless in the viral economy”. You need to elicit frustration, anger, excitement.

## PUSHED

**Thus the company pushed up sales of a mobile-phone game by creating a story about the game “being horrendously frustrating, using photographs of smashed phones”.**

The company does that deliberately, calculatingly. The same ap-

proach spreads elsewhere by spontaneous selection. Observer journalist Simon Parkin comments that he has seen on Twitter: “a shift in tone from lightheartedness to a kind of weaponised outrage that runs across almost all social circles”.

Bartlett, Anderson, and the other bosses at Social Chain are far from stereotype ruthless profiteers. “The company's culture officer buys flowers and cakes to mark every employee's birthday and anniversary”.

**The question is, how do we stop ourselves being defined by the manipulation of emotion, the synthesising of outrage, which streams into us from the social-media market.**

## Stop Lewisham CAMHS cuts

By Rosalind Robson

**Lewisham council is planning to cut funding to children's mental health services (CAMHS) by £150,000 over the next two years. This follows a £94,000 cut last year, and is on top of NHS “efficiency savings”.**

These cuts follow a pattern around the country. More than one in five local authorities has either frozen or cut its CAMHS budgets every year since 2010. £85m has gone from those budgets in six years.

A recent report by the Care Quality Commission shows that in some areas children and young people are waiting for up to 18 months to start treatment with the specialist service.

Lewisham is an area with high levels of poverty and deprivation and consequently it has a youth population with high risks factors for mental ill health.

At least three, and up to six, posts will be cut, on top of two that were cut last year.

The pressure of the waiting lists forces clinicians to choose between the “more deserving” and “least deserving” cases. Some young people will not be able to get any kind of specialist treatment at all.

But all “cases” of young people experiencing mental ill health are urgent. A six month wait (or

longer) is a very long time in a 14, 15 or 17 year-old's life. Children often end up in A&E in a desperate search for help; others self-harm, others drop out of school for long periods of time. This is completely unacceptable.

The most vulnerable children may get in-patient help but the hospital place may be a long way from their parents.

## TREND

**Mental illnesses often first occurs in adolescence, and it's trend that is rising to epidemic proportions.**

Yet we also know that if young people are able to access early support and treatment they can recover and get onto the road to adulthood with better mental health.

These cuts will not be the end. Over the next three years Lewisham council, again, like other councils around the country plans to pass a huge cut in funding.

**In Lewisham there will be a loss of something like £385 million in income (a 24% reduction in overall income).**

• The Lewisham Hospital Campaign has set up a campaign to stop these cuts. More details here: [bit.ly/2FGgYNQ](http://bit.ly/2FGgYNQ)



# French feminists debate response to #metoo

**Sarah Chiche, initiator of the statement by 100 French women including Catherine Deneuve, has explained the motivation behind it in an interview on the France-Culture website.**

**It all started with a pretty stunning discussion with a publisher about a text that I had written, which is being published.**

During this discussion, she said to me that these days it would be very unfashionable to speak so candidly about sexuality and love. And she followed this up by saying that, what's more, a novel like *The Sexual Life of Catherine M* by Catherine Millet would almost certainly never get published.

I came away from this discussion feeling extremely shocked and dismayed... I called Catherine Millet, who called Peggy Sastre, who called Abnousse Shalmani. Catherine Robbe-Grillet quickly got involved. And we decided that we had to do something.

We quite agree that what was happening as a result of the Weinstein case, this heightened awareness of sexual violence against women, was a much-needed and legitimate act of speaking out. The problem is that unleashing all this speech has led to a lot of excesses. We are seeing a sort of series of kangaroo courts in which all sorts of things are amalgamated together.

We quite agree that sexual violence, sexual abuse, is a crime. Rape is a crime. But insistent or awkward flirting is not a crime. And gallantry is not a macho aggression either...

**For you, this movement does not help women?**

We think that it does not help women develop our autonomy. It helps the enemies of sexual freedom: on the one hand, religious extremists; and on the other, reactionaries who think that women are these separate be-

ings, who, at the end of the day, just have to be protected...

And then, this wave of purges is bringing in its wake a resurgence of puritanism in the world of art. Just recently we heard about a producer who wanted to do a new version of the opera *Carmen*, at the end of which *Carmen* is stabbed by one of her lovers. He proposed that in this version, *Carmen* should stab the man, as a "homage" to the violence inflicted upon women. Is this a matter of a loose adaptation, to keep step with what's happening around us today? One certainly wonders.

## SERIOUS

**What is more serious is that it has been suggested that a nude by Egon Schiele should be censored on a poster, or that a painting by Balthus should be removed from a museum on the grounds that it is an apologia for paedophilia.**

There was all this business at the Cinematheque, where people have called for a Polanski retrospective to be banned, confusing the man and his work... Some people have asked some of the co-authors of this platform to make our male characters less sexist, or to write less freely about sexuality or love.

**Why not just write as an individual?**

Because in the aftermath of the Weinstein affair, a solidarity has been created, through #metoo. It seemed important to us that another kind of solidarity be created, among women, to give voice, collectively, to a different idea. Without silencing, in a hateful way, the voices of victims. Several of the signatories know very well what sexual violence is...

**What about getting men involved?**

No. We never gave it a moment's consider-



ation. It seemed to us important to come together as women. Even though since that morning we have been getting a lot of letters from both men and women, thanking us. Many women also didn't want to put their names to this statement for fear of being frowned upon by certain people. In particular I mean their colleagues, in light of the witch-hunt that's going on. But for all that, we know that we have their support and we are grateful to them...

We are very troubled by this return of the moral order. It can also be seen in cultural productions. When you look at the films doing the rounds today, they are nice diversions, which offer a nice cinematic experience, or "feel-good books". There is something very troubling and worrying lurking behind this desire for sterilised stories with happy endings, where all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

**What were the first reactions?**

I got a lot of men thanking us. But also a certain number of women who say: "I had no idea you were writing this text, I would have loved to sign it. Why didn't you ask me?" There is a website where these women can

join us.

We have also received a lot of very touching and intimate accounts from women about the violence that they have suffered and that they can't support our platform for that reason. Once again, we understand these messages and respect these words. Simply, other messages also underline that this text is an invitation to think about ways out other than victimisation.

And then, there will be the normal parade of hateful, vengeful little phrases, of the kind that we are used to on social media. That is just a part of the game and hate is often an ill-formulated way of asking for love. And so one needs to pay careful attention to hateful words.

**Are you inventing a new kind of feminism?**

[Laughing] I don't know. Yes. Maybe, maybe...

**Simply, when I see women fossilising themselves, mummifying themselves in their victimhood, in that identity, because I write, I think to myself that perhaps my writing could be a way of showing them that another feminism, another way is possible... [Abridged]**

# No such thing as a "right to bother" women

**Other French feminists have denounced Chiche and her co-writers**

**On January 9, 2018, while Oprah Winfrey was declaring at the Golden Globes, "We all have lived too many years in a culture broken by brutally powerful men... But their time is up. Their time is up!" — at that very moment, an opinion piece published in the French newspaper *Le Monde* by predominantly white, bourgeois women (who do not use gender-inclusive language) came to the rescue of these powerful men, making a case for their "right to bother" women.**

They inform us that anyway, "accidents that can happen to a woman's body do not necessarily harm her dignity." And that "rape is a crime. But..." But what? "...hitting on someone insistently or awkwardly is not an offense, nor is gallantry a chauvinist aggression."

Harvey Weinstein is not, that we know of, an awkward and timid man, a bit gauche, incapable of expressing his feelings. He is not a man reduced to a highly vulnerable state when facing women who would then have tried to express his desire in unfortunate attempts. It seems that the power dynamics — as well as the political, historical, and economic contexts that produce them — do not concern the upholders of a "freedom to

bother," who use as their very own personal experience as a sacrosanct excuse.

Yet, under the pretext of warning against a confusion between harassment, rape, and seduction, their text directly produces the said confusion... It works to undermine the word of millions of women from all social backgrounds who chose to speak out after an all too long silence, to share their experiences with the tools they have: social media. Thus, while claiming to be a call for vigilance, and an initiative for moral liberation, this op-ed only contributes to one thing: the reaffirmation of the dominant powers, calling for a return to the conservative order.

## CENSORSHIP

**Similarly, invoking the threat of censorship at a time when what was silenced is being spoken and explicitly spelled out is a strategy to turn the tables of violence: in the eyes of the 100 signatories, the victims have become the perpetrators.**

Did the signatories of *Le Monde's* op-ed even read what they classify as a campaign of "denunciation", or, with no fear of hyperbole, "a wave of purification"? Did they even bother to listen to what these women experienced? All the testimonies shared in the United States, France, and elsewhere since the Weinstein affair have been about violence, fear, dread, and shame. Everywhere,

women have made it clear that they do not mistake consensual sexual relationships and seduction for the acts and insults they have been subjected to.

Where does this confusion come from? It certainly exists among those who see harassment as a standardisation of "heavy flirting"...

Here, the French "cultural exception" serves as an opportunity to recycle the accusation of "puritanism", a French anti-feminist classic, used in this op-ed to reflect its clichés. Allegedly an American invention, feminism would contribute to one of the main wrongs of society: its puritanism and its prudishness... But of which sexual freedom are we talking about exactly? Or more precisely, who benefits from it? Who profits from the imperiousness of male desire? Where are the women's desire and pleasure expressed and developed? Who gets subjected to the offense? Who is systematically bothered?...

Moreover, the fact that this op-ed is written by women results from a well-known strategy: to counterpose, against feminists, other women who would not yield to victimisation.

We are looking at is a rhetorical gesture that aims to disqualify the claim for equality by implying that those who fight for it are exaggerating, are "going too far", or are "extremists". Yet, this classical technique of delegitimisation of minorities (typically en-

countered when disqualifying the actions of racialised groups) is mainly used to ignore the logics of inequality structuring the society. Rather than admitting that certain groups are subjected to unequal treatment, it puts the blame on those who are suffering. It maligns the people who are pointing out such inequalities, and outlining that the current state of things is the product of history. And it opens the doors to challenging the foundations of our current political and social order.

Yet by testifying on social media, these women have on the contrary made a political choice — precisely the one of breaking free from their status of silent and isolated victims to which they were previously assigned — in order to participate in a collective and international rebellion. There is a deliberate revolutionary act in any criticism of the establishment, and the spontaneous nature of the testimonies published online reveals that this movement is one of self-defence...

**We wanted to urgently respond to a reactionary rhetoric that seems all the more dangerous and harmful because it precisely prides itself on a false appeal to liberty. [Abridged]**

*Hourya Bentouhami, philosopher; Isabelle Cambourakis, publisher; Aurélie Fillod-Chabaud, sociologist; Amandine Gay, director; Mélanie Gourarier, anthropologist; Sarah Mazouz, sociologist; Émilie Notéris, author and queer theorist.*





# NHS winter crisis: stop this scandal!

By a junior doctor

**Hospitals across the country continue to buckle under the stress of winter-related conditions — persistent cold weather and a nasty strain of influenza. But the responsibility for this crisis must lie with the government.**

Further evidence of the danger patients face this winter were highlighted by the increased ambulance response times for even the patients with the most serious conditions — those waiting with potential conditions such as heart attacks and strokes — for whom every minute is vital.

Emergency Medicine Consultants from 68 hospitals have written to the Theresa May stating the risks to patient safety are “intolerable” and that patients are dying in hospital corridors waiting to be seen by overstretched doctors and nurses.

Unlike last winter, where claims of a “humanitarian crisis” were said by NHS organisations to be overblown, those same organisations are now pulling no punches. Last winter NHS bosses were keen to curry favour with the government. This winter even the NHS Providers’ Chief Executive Chris Hopson has made the unprecedented statement that the “NHS can no longer deliver the standards enshrined in its constitution”.

Hopson highlights year-round bed occupancy rates above the recommended 85%. That is to say, the NHS is running at unsafe levels of bed occupancy even when there isn’t a winter crisis.

By an ambulance worker

**Ambulance crews are on the go all the time, every day of the week, at every hour.**

But we can tell it’s an exceptionally busy shift when our control room are constantly calling out for crews to respond to “purple calls” the highest priority life-saving incidents. Or when we’re told there are 30 jobs outstanding on the stack when we book on for a shift.

This is how it’s been over the last few weeks.

When there’s not enough crews to meet demand, patients are waiting longer for an ambulance and in some cases being told an ambulance is not available.

In many situations that means patients’ conditions worsening. Elderly patients who’ve fallen are left on the floor for hours; people who have collapsed go without treatment for long periods. This means

Despite the dire warnings by NHS staff last winter, little has been done to provide extra funding, resources, or staff to deal with an expected level of winter demand. The failings of government have been left clearly exposed.

Phillip Dunne, Health Minister has been sacked after he said patients without hospital beds would be able to sit in chairs. Pressure for a response, of any kind, from the government has shown up divisions in the Conservative Party.

Despite it all however, Jeremy Hunt has kept his job as Secretary of State for Health. He has even been given a promotion, responsibility for Social Care has been put under his remit. Hunt’s apology to patients for cancelled operations has infuriated healthcare workers. They want more than an apology for the mess that this Government has created.

Healthcare unions are united in calling for action from the government, but we need more. It’s time for the unions to demand decisive action in particular emergency funding to recruit extra staff and open more hospital beds. Unions need to take action if that is not forthcoming and use their industrial strength to protect patient safety and the long-term interests of the NHS.

**The Emergency Demonstration for the NHS on the 3 February must be the start of a campaign for our unions to take a stronger role in exposing, and correcting, these scandalously poor levels of patient care.**

**Solidarity 460 will be published on 31 January**

stress for emergency ambulance staff.

The headline problem has been ambulances waiting at A&E departments across the country. I’ve heard of four hour waits in my area. It’s down to peaks in demand, lack of staff in A&E to hand over to, and bed shortages in the hospitals so patients cannot be taken from A&E to a ward. Emergency crews, needed out on the road are stood around for hours. It’s absurd!

We also end up taking more people to A&E, those who have less immediate health problems because GPs, mental health services, district nurses are over stretched too. That makes the situation even worse.

Two consistent major issues for staff are very limited training and the lack of support and respite time. Such things get completely squeezed out at this time of year, they treated as if they are luxuries.

**Staff often work an extra hour on top of a 10 or 12 hour shift. Every day is exhausting.**

## Left wins Labour Executive, now resist the blackmail

**The Momentum left’s decisive victory in the election for the three new places on the Labour Party National Executive has produced sharp reactions in the press.**

Most of the reports read like press releases for Labour’s right-wing fringe, with quotations from Progress officials and right-wing MPs denouncing Momentum and demanding that the left, having won, behaves as if it has lost. However the *Times*, always more candid and more daring in its attitude to Labour’s rank and file called explicitly for any Labour MP who is deselected to resign and fight by-elections as independents!

On one level, this seems wildly over the top. But, as with so many times since 2015, mild demands and breakthroughs from the left have produced vicious denunciation and threats from the right precisely because they break from the pattern of three decades, the pattern of the left being crushed and anything vaguely like class politics marginalised.

Even if you discount more radical possibilities, the prospect of the left and labour movement breaking out of that pattern is high stakes enough for the ruling class. The *Times* is clear on what is at stake: “Labour’s stance as a constitutionalist, moderate party of social reform at home and as a supporter of the transatlantic alliance in foreign and defence policy”, i.e its utter subservience to aggressive neo-liberal capitalism.

Socialists must insist on the left calmly resisting this blackmail. This or that tactical consideration notwithstanding, Labour’s membership has both a right and a responsibility to continue — or, really, begin — the transformation of the party.

Allowing the political establishment, its press and the Labour right to maintain a veto over “difficult” issues like reselection of MPs will block that transformation. It will mean that decisive issues which as yet have barely been raised in the movement — for instance repealing all the anti-union laws — are subject to the same kind of veto.

Local Labour Parties should ask their MPs for statements that they will not stand against the party if deselected and, if they refuse, should, tell people about it...

We carry on raising “difficult” but necessary issues as forcefully as possible. That applies to democratising the structures of the party, pushing the limitations of the carefully-controlled official Democracy Review. Here, we fight to end disciplinary procedures being used to expel socialist activists as well as on the issue of parliamentary candidates.

It applies to Labour’s programme and policies, where even motions passed unanimously by conference — for instance on re-

versing NHS privatisation and on the right to strike — are largely ignored. What the party campaigns on is badly inadequate even from a social-democratic point of view.

It applies to Labour’s whole political culture, from local parties to the National Executive, to Labour councils, in numerous respects.

Raising demands for democratisation and left-wing policies will be limited and sterile if they are not linked to getting members and the party as a whole active in campaigning on the streets.

Central to that must be supporting workers’ struggles and rebuilding living links with workplaces and unions in order to revive a working-class political culture. Central too is building lively, campaigning local Young Labour groups in every constituency and Labour Clubs on every campus.

**As a Corbyn-led Labour government approaches, the challenges and threats the movement face will only grow. The possibility of even Labour’s existing promises being carried out effectively depends on organising for a much more radical program and ideas than are on the agenda of either the Labour or Momentum leaderships.**

### DEFEND JON LANSMAN

**Progress’s attacks on the Labour left following their National Executive win have focused on Momentum chair Jon Lansman.**

Lansman is a high profile figure with a long history of campaigning for democracy and left policies in the party. But the attacks are hung on — an may have an impact because of — Lansman’s contradictory record and role since 2015.

When right-wingers point out the undemocratic way in which Momentum is run and the convulsions this has produced (most recently Lansman’s shutting down of what was left of Momentum Youth and Students after his supporters reduced it to a fragment putting out Stalinist propaganda), they are obviously grotesque hypocrites.

They intertwine their attacks with criticisms of mandatory reselection and other left-wing demands as if they were all the same thing. Nonetheless, some of what they say about Lansman and Momentum is true!

It is good that Lansman was elected comfortably; we should defend him against the right’s cynical and opportunistic attacks.

**That should not mean airbrushing his central role in turning Momentum into a tightly controlled, politically timid organisation and in the process miseducating an important layer of activists.**







# Tunisian youth fight back

By Michael Elms

**Since the start of 2018 demonstrators have taken to the streets in Tunisia, protesting against the rising cost of living. The army was deployed following the death of a protestor, Khomsi el-Yerfeni, in Tebourba on 9 January.**

When mass protests in Tunisia, led by the labour movement and the UGTT trade union federation, toppled the dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on 14 January 2011, the work of dismantling the neo-liberal order he had built was only beginning.

Seven years on, Tunisia's workers are still bearing the terrible weight of poverty and inequality, and their struggles for justice have ground on.

For example, in the Gafsa phosphate mining region, the cradle of the Arab Spring, a large palm and date plantation has been occupied by local workers since 2011, in spite of bloody repression by the "county set" and their henchmen.

Further south, in oil-rich Tataouine, 2017 saw a mass movement of unemployed youth carrying out sit-ins, marches and roadblocks to demand jobs, unemployment in the region running at 27% (36% among graduates). Worried authorities created 1,500 jobs right away, promising as many more by 2019.

## STRIKES

**Strikes and protests have swept the country periodically since the revolution, but none as substantial as those seen in recent days.**

On 1 January 2018, President Caïd Essebsi's coalition government of secularists and Islamists brought its Finance Law into force. The Finance Law aims to repay international lenders and cut the government's deficit by levying hefty taxes on consumer goods, covering everything from phone calls to coffee. The price increases resulting from these taxes come on top of substantial inflation: the price of fresh vegetables went up 12.8% in 2017, olive oil 21.3%.

Nightly protests began shortly after the law came into force. By 8 January they had spread across the country, including to Sidi Bouzid, the birthplace of Mohamed Bouazizi, whose death in 2010 sparked the Arab Spring. Roadblocks and the destruction of banks, police stations and official buildings became widespread. Participation in the protests is overwhelmingly working-class, and the traditionally-militant Ettadhamen district of Tunis has been particularly mobilised.

On the island of Djerba, someone took advantage of the chaos to burn a Jewish school, an act thought to be politically unrelated to the protests, but indicative of the antisemitism which has surged in traditionally-tolerant Tunisia alongside rising Islamist influence since 2011.

The Popular Front of left-wing opposition parties called for mass rallies against the law to coincide with the 14 January anniversary of Ben Ali's flight. But the "Fech Nestanow?" [What are we waiting for?] coalition of youth activists may be more influential in directing the slogans and pace of events.

On 3 January, the grouping gathered on Tunis's grand Avenue Habib Bourguiba that runs between the market and the Ministry of the Interior, to distribute a manifesto calling for:

- guaranteed social and health coverage for the unemployed
- housing for poor families,
- increased benefits for poor families,
- a job for one member of every family,
- a revision of financial policy based on individual incomes,
- a national anti-corruption drive by the government,
- the suspension of the 2018 Finance Law.
- the creation of regional co-ordinations to press these demands.

Six days later they held rallies on the street outside the National Theatre, which has been a customary forum for political discussions since 2011, raising slogans like "The people demand the fall of the Finance Law and the government" and "Citizens, work hard and give your money to [Prime Minister] Chahed". The words "Fech Nestanow" have since appeared on walls across Tunisia.

Fech Nestanow is a network of younger activists whose leading figures are drawn in large part from the "Menich Msama" movement ["I won't forgive"], which opposed a proposal to pardon old-regime figures charged with corruption. One of their spokespeople, Henda Chennaoui, is a 34-year-old freelance journalist. Another spokesman, Wael Naouar, is himself a member of the Popular Front.

**On Saturday 13 January, UGTT leaders and politicians from the coalition government met in the Palace of Carthage, the opulent former residence of Ben Ali, to draft proposals for a package of poverty-relief measures. But the Popular Front and Fech Nestanow have denounced the package and protests continued as *Solidarity* went to press.**

# Iran: Haft

**Morad Shirin of the Iranian Revolutionary Marxist Tendency spoke to *Solidarity* about the continuing protest movement in Iran.**

**There have been more strikes and protests during the past week for payment of unpaid wages and other basic demands.**

There have been at least 600 such protests in the past year and they will probably increase as we approach the Iranian New Year, with workers demanding their new year bonuses and so on. Wage arrears of many months exist in many industries, including state-owned, part-private, fully-private, religious endowments and the Pasdaran [Revolutionary Guards]. The various businesses owned by the Pasdaran amount to about a quarter of the economy.

On 15 January, 500 day-labourers at Haft Tappeh (a sugarcane complex with plantations and refineries), warned management that if their demands have not been met by Friday then they will occupy the factory on Saturday. Today was also the 32nd day of the Tabriz Traktor-sazi (tractor) workers' protest against the factory being closed down and the second day of the latest protest in Phases 22, 23 and 24 of the South Pars gas field, the biggest in the world, in Asaluyeh. The Asaluyeh contractor has agreed to pay the contract workers' unpaid wages.

All trade union and workers' organisations remain illegal. During the Khatami period, however, many labour activists tried to re-launch their old trade unions or even found new unions and organisations. Unfortunately many became involved in semi-open or even open activities to achieve their aims. So the leaders were quickly thrown in jail, or exiled, or put into a position where they could not be active.

Whenever you get a relative loosening of repression you have a blossoming of activity and organisation in the Iranian workers' movement. After the regime tightens up again, leaders and activists are exiled or imprisoned. So you don't get continuity, and in the next phase activists have to start from a lower level. The experience of the previous group or generation is not always transferred. (This is also true of other movements like the students.)

## Stop the repression — free arrested student activists in Iran!

**Student activists in the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts have drafted a statement with exiled Iranian student radicals in protest against the repression of student activists in Iran. To add your name to this statement, email [againstfeesandcuts@gmail.com](mailto:againstfeesandcuts@gmail.com)**

**Following the Iranian state's attempt to repress the protests for democracy and against austerity which erupted at the end of December, student activists have been at the sharp end of the crackdown.**

The many hundreds arrested include at least 90 left-wing students, probably now many more; some of the 23 definitely killed at the time of writing are also students. Security forces have surrounded and in some cases invaded university campuses. Other students are being hunted and kidnapped from their homes and dorms. Those captured may well face torture.

Student activists have raised slogans against all factions of the regime, for democracy, against capitalism, for student-worker unity. We support their demands. And we demand the release of arrested student, labour movement and other political activists immediately.

**Solidarity with our comrades!**



# Tappeh workers take the lead



Students protest in front of Evin prison where many of those arrested during the protests are being held

Ten years ago, workers at Haft Tappeh were talking about “general anti-capitalist united action” being necessary. It is clear that they have retained some continuity. This time they have adopted a tactic of keeping the organisers hidden from the regime.

A lot of the workers on the protests have had their faces covered, like guerrillas. There are a number of videos showing workers’ leaders with covered faces standing on a box talking to other workers, with many of those listening also covering their faces. Haft Tappeh has at least one woman leader who is not known to the regime.

## TACTIC

**This tactic of the Haft Tappeh workers is an important gain of the workers’ movement.**

They first did it during the recent strike in November, and now they are able to threaten a takeover of the factory if management continues to hold on to their pay.

Haft Tappeh seems to be the most active section of workers, with the best slogans and tactics. They know that they can’t behave like a European trade union. With the bus drivers, for example, you know who their leader is, and he is in jail. The whole leadership is known. The bus workers’ leader Reza

Shahabi, who has served his sentence, is back in Evin jail and has had two strokes while in there!

The street protests showed that other layers like the unemployed and the poor are also fed up with their sinking standard of living. Since January 2016, when the nuclear deal came into force, the excuse of “we are under attack from America” has gone. The economy has picked up: in 2016 GDP grew by 12.3% and oil exports have doubled. Now oil is \$70 a barrel, the highest for three years. Workers and the poor see Maseratis, Porsches and other luxury items coming in, but suddenly the price of eggs goes up by 50%. Given such a situation, a simple thing like the price of eggs in Mashhad can spark big protests all over the country.

Ultimately, however, it is what the working class does as a class that matters. What is needed is workers’ clandestine action committees that can eventually co-ordinate their struggle and build towards a general strike. This is vitally necessary and it can develop from what looks like a defensive struggle for unpaid wages, like in Haft Tappeh.

**Workers’ clandestine action committees can also link with clandestine neighbourhood committees as the balance of class forces change and the masses join what Haft Tappeh workers were hoping for in May 2008: “general anti-capitalist united action”.**

## Trump to renew nuclear deal

By Johnny Whiteley

**Donald Trump is set to maintain the 2015 “nuclear deal” with Iran when it comes up for renewal on 17 January.**

Under the deal Iran is obliged to restrict its nuclear programme in return for the easing of international sanctions.

Trump had previously declared his intention to undo the nuclear deal, denouncing it as weakness in the face of the regime. Accordingly, he has had to hedge his renewal of the deal with much tough-sounding bluster and secondary sanctions.

Trump and Republican politicians have suggested setting a deadline for “improvements” to the deal, including getting rid of the “sunset clause” under which the deal will expire in 2025, and expanding the powers the deal gives to inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency.

At the same time, the Trump administration has pursued second-line sanctions policies targeting the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, who were classified a terror group by the US Treasury in October 2017, and other groups and individuals including the head of Iran’s judiciary, Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani.

The decision to maintain the nuclear deal and sustain Iran’s economic opening to the west was surely motivated by the substantial economic interests that western capitalists have acquired in Iran, such as substantial recent deals between Iranian airlines and France’s Airbus aeroplane manufacturer. It may also be due to the reasonable calculation that restoring the sanctions regime would strengthen conservative, revanchist factions in the Iranian ruling class, allowing them to blame falling living standards on foreign enemies rather than their own profit-gouging.

Meanwhile protests in Iran have spread to the massive South Pars gas field and the fuel tanker fleet, while regular protests outside the notorious Evin prison in Tehran and socialist-led worker militancy in the Haft-Tappeh sugarcane complex continue.

**There have been solidarity rallies with the Iranian protest movement in over 50 cities around the world.**

## Socialism makes sense

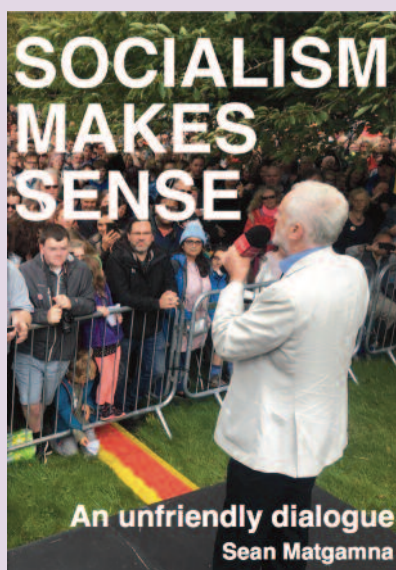
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# Documenting the “new transgressives”

Charlie George reviews *Kill All Normies: online culture wars from 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the alt-right* by Angela Nagle

**How did Steve Bannon, who Nagle describes as “an anti-establishment figure with ambitious ideas”, go from editing “the alt-right’s go-to website” to being Donald Trump’s chief strategist?**

How did Bannon get from the centre of the leading capitalist power, before being told by Trump that he had “lost his mind”, and losing his role at ‘Breitbart’ alt-right news site? Nagle does not tell us these things.

Instead, we are presented with an engaging — if flawed — series of anecdotes charting the history of the alt-right from their origins in the depths of 4chan (an online message board, known as the starting point for many internet memes). Today the alt-right have sufficient social and political weight to be blamed for murders, suicides, rapes. Some even claim they have President Donald Trump lying at their feet.

Nagle’s core argument is that the alt-right believe they are transgressives against the societal norms imposed by the liberal cultural mainstream which has grown up over the last few decades. They oppose the “humourless, self-righteous, right-on” left.

Acting under the belief that “politics is downstream from culture”, to paraphrase Andrew Breitbart, the alt-right push parodies of left-wing politics and attacks — predominantly on women and ethnic minorities. The

jokes have become increasingly serious, but all the while the would-be comedians claim the joke is only really to be understood in their insular online community, and that those who take them seriously should be mocked.

What are these men (the alt-right is a mostly male movement) fighting for? Nagle says they believe they are fighting for a lost time of morality, before the supposed fall of Western civilisation. These men believe they will be leading a “beta rebellion” — a term used to describe the supposed subjugated nature of straight white men — in defence of “Western morality”. All this from their platform of the online message board ‘Anime Death Tentacle Rape Whorehouse’.

## LOSERS

**While Nagle does well to expose the absurdity of the alt-right, her major failing is a total lack of materialist analysis. At no point are we told the class origins of any of the groups involved, nor how much wealth and power they have in the US or the world.**

Indeed it appears that we are meant to take it for granted that the alt-right are left-behind losers.

Whether this is the case or not, the lack of an explanation of the interactions between the alt-right figureheads as they came closer to the mainstream of the Republican Party, and their impact on the movement, is telling of a wider problem with the book.

Nagle does not examine the wider context of the alt-right’s rise.

One example, and one of only a couple of references to Britain in the text, is to describe the young Tory party members’ campaign to “Hang Nelson Mandela” during the Thatcher years as an early equivalent of right-wing transgression. But are the rich kids of Britain’s governing political party allying with the racist South African regime really the equivalent to someone living their life online and sharing a frog meme? I don’t think so.

Nagle further briefly focuses on the liberal online grouping organised around the identity politics of Tumblr (a microblogging website), mocking them. This analysis of left-wing identity politics is also lacking.

Described simply as “the Tumblr Left” by Nagle, she dismisses their “absurd” politics as stemming from them being “ultra-sensitive”. But the problem here is not so much sensitivity as a lack of class analysis. Because of their liberalism, “the Tumblr Left” shrinks from taking militant action, and calls on the powers that be to enforce bans against those they do not like.

Another, overarching, failure of the book, is the lack of seriousness with which it treats its subject — there are no references. Despite its very short length, the book does not flow very well and, as other reviewers have pointed out, it is full of typos.

Part of this lacklustre approach is the constant shallow reference to left-wing academics and their schools of thought — the Situationists, Bourdieu, Gramsci and so on — without coming close to adequately explaining the relevance of their ideas.



Ultimately, *Kill All Normies* is a good introduction to the alt-right, but that’s it.

While we are waiting for a more sophisticated analysis the class-struggle socialist left, must not allow the far-right to dominate the debate, while we fall into performative denunciations. Instead, we must present a strong socialist alternative working to unite the working-class against capitalism and its politics of division.

**We must fight the liberal urge to ban political opponents as some sort of principle. Instead we must take militant action to fight our opponents.**

# Fighting the cuts with council tax hikes?

## LABOUR

By Simon Nelson

**The departure of Chris Williamson from the Shadow Cabinet has been explained by Williamson and others around the Labour leadership as either a conflict over principle or the removal of a maverick left-winger.**

It is true that Williamson has spoken out on other issues outside his brief as Shadow Fire Minister, in his weekly online videos. Most recently he advocated rises in council tax for more expensive homes.

At the same time he has been the member of the Shadow Cabinet most comfortable with defending the Maduro government of Venezuela, with defending Cuba and some of Labour’s activists who are hostile to the existence of Israel. He also played a rather more conservative role in the long-running dispute between Teaching Assistants and the Derby council of which he is a former leader. It is notable that his proposals on raising council tax do not mention the TAs.

Given this, it is disappointing that the final straw triggering Williamson’s departure appears to have been the call for a doubling of council tax on valuable homes as a way to combat local government cuts, something that is not currently Labour Party policy. Regardless of the merits of the policy, it represents an attempt to put forward some sort of policy on the cuts and something which has been missing since “Corbynism” started.

Williamson now says: “I decided to stand down to give me that freedom to feed the fire which keeps the establishment on their toes.” Undoubtedly being in the Shadow Cabinet would have tied him to the collective discipline that he felt held him back.

It seems the Labour right see Williamson’s departure as the start of a more sensible shadow cabinet. Clive Lewis has been appointed as his replacement; Lewis was also a rebel on Article 50, and is known to favour the replacement of Trident.

The tactic of raising council tax is very much open to debate. It is right that councils need to find a way to claw back funds, cut from central government since 2010.

A joined-up campaign between councils, affiliated local government unions, and the national party and wider movement to call for the restoration of these funds would be the starting point to do this.

Williamson is absolutely right to say, “After eight years of austerity, the argument that cuts are the responsibility of central government is wearing thin with the electorate. Following the enthusiasm with which the public embraced Labour’s redistributive 2017 manifesto, now is the time to start translating that ethos into Labour in local government.”

He uses the example of his own constituency in Derby North to illustrate austerity. Local library closures have convinced him that now is the time for a more radical approach.

“A local authority could for example propose to double council tax and then promise full discounts to those living in band A to C, followed by an 80 per cent discount to those



in band D (in effect a 20 per cent increase), 60 per cent discount for Band E, 40 per cent for Band F, 20 per cent for Band G, with only those living in band H properties paying double.”

## REFERENDUM

**Williamson goes on to argue for a means-tested system of support for those on low incomes in higher-banded homes and that such a policy could therefore be won in the referendum which would be used to vote it in.**

The Tory’s plan to stop all central government funding by 2020 would mean this is just a stop gap measure, but it is one that would buy time and allow extra investment where it is needed.

Williamson goes on to cite the radical Labour leadership of councils like Lambeth in the 1980s which increased rates when they were able to, in order to combat the Tory cuts. As with the rates increase, without a coordinated fightback against the government, the

raising of council tax will still put pressure on households in areas like London and the South East where the number of Band A properties is relatively low, even taking the rise in values into account since 1993.

In a referendum, where a full explanation of the policy of means testing would not be on the ballot paper, support is unlikely. The policy will be seen as a vote to raise the level of council tax, something which, in a time of wage stagnation, benefit cuts and increasing household debt, would be very difficult to win, and for good reason.

This policy idea deserves discussion but fundamentally the refusal of Labour councils to build and support anti-cuts campaigns since 2010 has been a major failing. Too many councils have not just implemented Tory cuts but have done it with some glee and often gone deeper and further than they had to!

**Labour councils must coordinate with local campaigns, call for support from the labour movement and the national party to begin a genuine fight to reverse the cuts and fight for decent services.**



# Locking horns with the Tory government

Rosalind Robson begins a two-part article on the 1972 struggle over council house rents in the Derbyshire town of Clay Cross.

**Clay Cross Labour council's defiance in the face of a Tory government which wanted to increase council house rents, and the council's determination to keep rents low, is a landmark event in British labour movement history and deserves to be better known.**

In that struggle, one set of councillors was dismissed and surcharged, as a Tory-appointed Housing Commissioner, sent to collect the higher rents. Because the Labour Party in Clay Cross was politically prepared and had a clear strategy, a second set of Labour councillors refused to co-operate with the Commissioner. For two years the council held out and the rents stayed low. What is the background to these events?

For most of its history, up to the early 1970s, Clay Cross was a mining town and largely run by the mining company, the Clay Cross Company. The town was a key location for transporting coal from the Midlands and the north to London by rail.

While the Clay Cross Company profited from the expanding coal industry in the nineteenth century, there was desperate poverty in the town. The Company built back-to-back terraces for its workforce and these soon became slums.

By 1919, some of the worst slums had been demolished but they were had only been replaced by inadequate homes. For example a municipal scheme of 1800 houses was built but only 130 had baths and only 500 had toilets. Despite subsequent small municipal housing schemes, much substandard housing remained at the start of the 1960s.

Trade unionism began to be built from the 1860s but there was relatively little industrial militancy until the 1950s. At that time the Labour Party was very small. According to the historical account by Clay Cross councillor David Skinner and journalist Julia Langdon, it was nationalisation of the coal industry in 1948 which broke the "company town" culture. By the late 1950s, Dennis Skinner, then a miner and activist in the National Union of Miners (NUM), together with another NUM member, Bill Lander, and others, were working to revitalise the local Labour Party and win control of the council. They organised street canvassing, public meetings and political education.

Dennis Skinner explains the strategy:

"The council as a unit was strong because it had developed its policies as an expression of the will of the people it served. It knew

those policies were right because of the growing political awareness in the town, because it was clear that people had learned to care what happened there, because — unlike in many local authority areas — between 65 and 75 per cent of them bothered to turn out and vote whenever there were elections."

In short political canvassing was linked to socialist policies which in turn strengthened the Labour Party.

In 1960 Dennis Skinner was elected to the Clay Cross Urban District Council. Three years later Clay Cross had a 100% Labour council, winning it from Independents. From 1959 until 1974 (when it was abolished), the Labour Party won every seat it contested on the council.

Social conditions in Clay Cross at this time were very bad. By the end of the 60s all 14 pits within a five-mile radius of the town had been shut down. In April 1968 unemployment in Clay Cross was nearly six per cent and by the end of the year had risen to 9%. In April 1971 it was 15%. Many young people had left the town and with its ageing population came more burdens for the local council. The council responded to social needs of the elderly by providing sheltered accommodation and free bus passes and free TV licenses for pensioners. It responded to other social needs as well, for instance it set up a social centre with holiday playgroups for children, they continued to provide free school milk after it was abolished by the Tory government in 1971. The council was prepared to fiddle budgets and explore legal loopholes to make these kinds of provisions.

## SLUM CLEARANCE

**At the heart of their programme was getting rid of the old Clay Cross Company slum housing and replacing it with new council homes.**

By 1970 the council had pulled down 551 houses. The programme cost a lot of money as it involved buying the slums from the Clay Cross Company, purchasing land, and building new homes. The council chose not to, as was usual, take out expensive government loans. Instead they used money collected through general rates (the local tax which is now known as council tax). Rents on the new homes were set at 25 shillings a week, the second lowest in the country and no more than that being paid by tenants of the Clay Cross Company. Again, rents were kept low by using rate money to subsidise them. Clay Cross Council was "bending the rules" in the full expectation that they should and would live with any likely consequences.

The council asked for financial help from the Labour government which was in power before 1970, but were knocked back.

The Labour group on the council, in the main, understood that they were serving the interests of their constituents (a largely poor, and increasingly unemployed, mining community). The councillors also reported to, and made themselves accountable to, monthly meetings of members of the local Labour Party. From the start councillors also understood that if they were not prepared to stick to the democratically-decided majority policies of the group they were expected to resign.

Inevitably, as the housing programme advanced pressure mounted on the council. Two Labour councillors, Bill Blowen and Derek Mart, buckled under the pressure and tried to get the Labour group to increase council house rents. Their aim was to ease the growing deficit in the housing revenue account deficit, a deficit which would be no-



ticed by and frowned upon by other, national, state authorities. But the rent increases they wanted included a £1 a week increased on old age pensioners' bungalows. When Blowen and Mart failed to win support they resigned from the council.

At the beginning of 1967 the Town Clerk (a senior council official) recommended increasing rents, to deal with the deficit. A Residents Association was set up to oppose the council policy by a local businessman who recruited people on the private housing estate where he lived. He managed to get, so he claimed, 1,500 ratepayers signed up to his group, as well as the support of councillors Blowen and Mart.

In 1969 when the District Auditor found the housing revenue account had a £30,000 deficit he ordered the council to balance the books immediately. Rents were then raised by 4 shillings a week; not good but the raise was the first in five years. The average council house rent was then 32 shillings including rates and it remained at that level for the next five years. In the next year when the council officials pushed further rent increases the council refused.

With pressure mounting a third Labour councillor broke ranks. Henry Houseley was purely worried for himself. At a meeting of the Labour group he said:

"When the District Auditor recommends a rent increase you've got to do something about it. I was not prepared to take the risk of being surcharged [i.e. fined for allowing the council to run up a deficit] and mortgaging my home, I am sure the ratepayers of Clay Cross would not expect us to stand a surcharge."

But in the municipal elections of 1969 the council's mandate was endorsed and the Labour swept the board.

In May 1970 the Ministry of Housing wrote to the council saying they should do what the District Auditor told them to do or face the threat of legal action.

In the autumn of 1969 the District Auditor, Charles Lacey, began an investigation into whether or not the Residents Association's claim that a transfer of £24,671 from the gen-

eral rate fund to the housing account was unreasonable and excessive was true.

In the event, the District Auditor found in favour of the council and did not uphold the Residents Association complaints. Perhaps Lacey had been impressed, or intimidated, by the groundswell of local support given to the council at the elections.

One of the councillor's, Graham Smith defended the policy in this way: "[in a situation of high unemployment] to rehouse people... from low rented property into new property at economic rent would place intolerable burdens on them."

Most mainstream councillors today would not dare to defy government authority or even their own Chief Executive. They would not bend the rules. They would regard any attempts to do so, even the mildest ones as revolutionary as being far out of step with "public opinion". That perception is the result of decades of failed class struggles and diminished horizons.

Yet for Clay Cross councillors their actions were not revolutionary. It was a simple matter of democracy. Dennis Skinner told Lacey: "A local authority having got its mandate must stick to it. If we are surcharged on this matter we are being deprived of carrying out our promises. We are being told that pledges we have made cannot be carried out."

One councillor told a newspaper: "Ask the people of Clay Cross if we're rebels, they'll tell you what we really are: we're not politicians, we're not economists; we're honest ordinary people who represent other honest ordinary people who have a voice in society and have made it heard through the democratic process."

**This was the council that would go on to lock horns with the Tory government over its housing policy.**

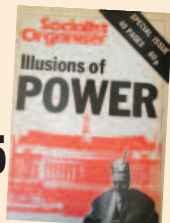
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<https://municipaldreams.wordpress.com>

**Further reading:**  
**Illusions of Power:**  
**the local**  
**government**  
**left 1979-85**



Read online <http://bit.ly/2DDFmzk>



# Where we stand

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production.

The capitalists' control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class must unite to struggle against capitalist power in the workplace and in wider society.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty wants socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control, and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for trade unions and the Labour Party to break with "social partnership" with the bosses and to militantly assert working-class interests.

**In workplaces, trade unions, and Labour organisations; among students; in local campaigns; on the left and in wider political alliances we stand for:**

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women, and social provision to free women from domestic labour. For reproductive justice: free abortion on demand; the right to choose when and whether to have children. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!



## Events

### Saturday 20 January

Marxists, the labour movement, and the Labour Party dayschool  
Noon, Nunn Hall, Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, WC1H 0AL  
[bit.ly/2mbFltT](http://bit.ly/2mbFltT)

### Friday 26 January

Feminist Fightback Film Club Presents — We Are the Best!  
7.30pm, Common House, Unit 5E, Punderson's Gardens, London E2 9QG  
[bit.ly/2EL7pfm](http://bit.ly/2EL7pfm)

### Saturday 27 January

Rally — Defend Louise Harrison and SYWA Doncaster  
Noon, Mansion House, 45 High St, Doncaster DN1 1BN  
[bit.ly/2mApzJm](http://bit.ly/2mApzJm)

Have an event you want listing? Email: [solidarity@workersliberty.org](mailto:solidarity@workersliberty.org)

### Sunday 28 January

Marxists, the labour movement, and the Labour Party dayschool  
Noon, Rutland Arms, 86 Brown Street, Sheffield, S1 2BS  
[bit.ly/2AJYrws](http://bit.ly/2AJYrws)

### Saturday 3 February

Emergency Demonstration — NHS in Crisis: Fix It Now!  
Noon, Gower Street, London WC1E  
[bit.ly/2AIgALh](http://bit.ly/2AIgALh)

### 17-18 February

Student Feminist Conference  
10am, Institute of Education  
20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL  
[bit.ly/2FDYkpT](http://bit.ly/2FDYkpT)

More online at [www.workersliberty.org](http://www.workersliberty.org)



Workers' Liberty



@workersliberty

# Take organising seriously

## COMMENT

By David Morris

Whilst it contained some interesting historical content, Martin Thomas's feature on trade unions, 'From the "organising agenda" to the democracy & solidarity agenda' (*Solidarity* 457), fails utterly to grasp what the move to organising represents, the nature of the crisis in our unions or the historical approach our current has taken to the mass trade union movement.

We have traditionally understood that the mass industrial organisations of the working class are fundamental to our approach to changing the world. There is no "red" shortcut to transforming the existing labour movement. However exciting small fringe unions like the IWGB may be, and however bureaucratized the existing mass unions may be, the mass unions matter. And Marxists should have an opinion on how these mass unions operate, what activity they prioritise and how they organise workers.

### JOHN L LEWIS

**Our current has looked first and foremost to two key developments in trade union history for inspiration: New Unionism in Britain in the 19th century; and the birth of the Confederation of Industrial Organisations in the US in the 1930s.**

Fundamental to the latter was the role played by the United Mineworkers of America (UMW). John L Lewis (hardly without his faults and certainly no Marxist). The UMW took on over 100 full-time organisers and spent big — an initial \$500,000 — to organise the unorganised workers in "big steel" in Pennsylvania and then nationally. Not only did they succeed in building powerful union organisation but they beat big steel. It was celebrated as the breakthrough victory that it clearly was by, amongst others, James P. Cannon, the leader of the American Socialist Workers Party, from whom we have taken a lot about our union approach.

It was not "bad" that Lewis and the UMW took this initiative and spent this money on organising a proper industrial fight. It was a bloody good thing. It would not have been better if they had left it to spontaneous action from below or relied on "volunteers". It is absurd to suggest that today it is a negative thing for unions to take a similar approach to that taken by the UMW and invest big in well-resourced, serious attempts to organise unorganised sectors of the economy.

Martin portrays what he admits is a caricature of the organising model, and of the Australian union organiser Michael Crosby. It is simply not true that organisers are all



The 1889 dock strike — part of New Unionism

young and straight out of university (although young people and graduates have a lot to offer). I am a union organiser and my team consists of an ex-baggage handler, two ex-cabin crew, one ex-water worker, an ex-truck driver and an ex-teacher.

Without adequately explaining an organising approach or analysing the results or the causes of successes and failures, Martin dismisses the results of organising out of hand. In the UK the trade union officialdom flirted cautiously and briefly with the idea of organising in the late 1990s to the 2000s. Many gave the name "organiser" to some of their employees but few made serious attempts to become "organising unions" and I would argue that none so far have achieved this. But I would also argue that it would be a good thing if they did.

Organising can be seen as getting away from "servicing" the individual — through discounts, insurance, individual representations and legal services — to organising the collective workforce to build power and structures and campaigning activity, in order to take on the employers and make real change at work.

### BRONFENBRENNER

**Kate Bronfenbrenner, of Cornell University, looked in 1995 and again in 2004 at the effectiveness of union tactics in certification elections (union recognition campaigns).**

Her powerful conclusion is that it is a lack of seriously implementing organising tactics that is at the root of the many failed campaigns. Where a union has taken organising seriously and used these tactics they are much more likely to win. Whilst the SEIU embraced organising in the US (albeit with serious deficiencies with regard to the importance of lay leadership and rebuilding a shop stewards' movement) they doubled in size while the rest of the US union movement halved.

In the UK, when Unite (and previously the TGWU) organising department took on the meat industry it recruited tens of thousands of new — many overseas — workers; elected and trained hundreds of

new stewards; built a new national shop stewards' combine (which, ten years later continues to direct the union in the industry) and secured ground-breaking deals with the supermarket clients and multinational employers that dominated the industry. This resulted in big pay rises for thousands of low paid workers, trade union recognition and parity of pay and a pathway to permanency for agency labour — which made up 80% of the workforce at the start of the campaign and 20% at the end. Unite / TGWU also won union recognition in the low-cost airlines at Easyjet, Thomas Cook and (despite the company contracting union-busters the Burke Group) FlyBe. Martin seems to believe that it would be better for Unite to not do this sort of thing.

The cause of the failures identified by Bronfenbrenner and observed in our unions is an unwillingness to take a serious, combative, resourced and managed — organising approach. If you have spent a little time intimately involved in the union movement you will understand that possibly the major problem with our unions is that they are afflicted by a core of lethargic, cautious, self-serving and incompetent bureaucrats.

It suits them to take a "servicing approach" and represent individuals, promote benefits and so on. That is why they have failed to wholeheartedly adopt an organising approach that relies on organising and mobilising workers to make change. That is why they resist the hard-working, tightly-managed culture that is associated with organising and outlined by Michael Crosby (despite his shortcomings).

Capitalist firms invest millions in building their organisations and in opposing ours. They take a highly strategic approach to driving down wages and busting or "avoiding" unions. We should not leave it to un-resourced, un-planned voluntary action to oppose them. We should advocate that our unions invest to organise new workers, build new shop stewards' organisations, build large strike funds, get their workplaces "strike-ready", be strategic, manage their employees effectively and confront and beat employers.

**In short, we should advocate that they organise.**



# End outsourcing at UoL!

**Security workers and receptionists at the University of London (UoL) will strike on 25 January over broken pay rise promises, with a protest in the evening in support of outsourced worker demands to be brought in house.**

**IWGB union organiser and press officer Emiliano Mellino spoke to *Solidarity*.**

**The campaign is going well. On every single protest we have there are more people — both workers and supporters.**

The Foundation Day protest on 21 November had easily 500 people, probably the biggest protest we've done at Senate House.

We are still waiting for a response from UoL management. They are still refusing to negotiate. But we know this is affecting them. We know that management talks about the strikes. We think it is a matter of time before they negotiate.

Just before Christmas we did a Christmas card writing session, sending cards to the VC with the workers' Christmas wishes. The campaign has also had the support of John McDonnell, who did a video address to the University calling on them to bring the workers back in house.

The next strike is security and receptionists. We have to renew the ballot for postroom workers and porters, and we have no doubt we will win that ballot. We are talking to cleaners about joining the action now. About 40 cleaners joined the

last protest and we expect more to come on 25 January.

The university is sensitive about their image, so we are organising strikes and protests for when there are big events going on. We chose 25 January because there is the biggest postgraduate fair happening at Senate House, when the UoL expects about 1000 people to be attending, with 90 universities holding stalls. It affects the UoL's image, but the university also makes a large amount of money from these sorts of events. For future strikes we will be looking at targeting other such events, open days, graduations, big public events.

In-house workers at the university were incredibly supportive from the start. Many of them are IWGB members as well. Over 500 signed a petition supporting the outsourced workers' demands. We've had letters of support from a variety of university UCU, Unison and Student Union branches, and many of them come to our strikes and protests with banners.

The number of UoL management earning over £100,000 has gone from seven in 2012-13, to 21 from in 2015-16. The 2016-17 accounts are not out yet but we have no doubt it



**Christmas cards sent by workers to the Vice Chancellor**

will have gone up again. At the same time the VC has had an inflation busting pay rise, not to mention his expenses! The money to pay workers, and to bring the contract in house, is there.

The issues of precarity and casualisation at universities are becoming increasingly known. It is not just an issue for outsourced workers. It is happening to other university workers as well.

**It has become clear, particularly with the news of Carillion, what the reality of outsourcing is. Workers lose. The government or institution loses. The only winners are the outsourcing company bosses.**

- Find out more: [bit.ly/2B6pYbv](http://bit.ly/2B6pYbv)
- Donate to the strike fund: [bit.ly/2slf1lq](http://bit.ly/2slf1lq)

## Picturehouse locks out workers

**By Gemma Short**

**Workers at five Picturehouse cinemas in London will strike for 13 days starting on 20 January.**

The strike will include two 48 hour strikes on 20-21 and 26-27 January. Despite other strikes in the period being for partial days, the management one of the cinemas, the Ritzy in Brixton, has decided to shut the cinema completely for the whole 13 day period. Workers at the cinema have described this as a

"lock out", and an attempt by management to "starve them back to work".

An emergency appeal for funds was launched and within a few days raised £13,000 of a £20,000 target thanks to a rallying of support from across the labour movement. Fundraising is still going on and supporters are urged to donate using the details below.

**Community supporters of the strikes will be organising two weekends of action at Picturehouse and Cineworld cinemas**

**around the country on 20-21 and 27-28 January. Supporters are urged to organise community pickets in their area.**

- Bectu strike fund: Account number 33045388, Sort code 60-83-01. When donating send an email to [tnandhra@bectu.org.uk](mailto:tnandhra@bectu.org.uk) copying in [ritzylivingwage@gmail.com](mailto:ritzylivingwage@gmail.com) stating that the donation is for the Picturehouse strike fund and asking for confirmation of receipt.
- Donate online at: [bit.ly/2dF19KL](http://bit.ly/2dF19KL)

## Strikes at Fujitsu over victimisation

**By Peggy Carter**

**Workers at Fujitsu in Manchester will strike for 11 days over victimisation of union reps, breaches of the company's redundancy agreement, and compulsory redundancies.**

Unite members at Fujitsu have been fighting job cuts and a victimisation culture for over a year. The latest round of strikes comes after a

Unite rep of 26 years standing, Ian Allinson, was sacked. Ian Allinson said: "On Tuesday (9 January), while I was on compassionate leave for a family funeral, Fujitsu sent me a letter telling me that I will be dismissed tomorrow (12 January) after more than 30 years' service, including 26 as a union rep.

"Despite having an outstanding internal job application which Fujitsu has not responded to, the com-

pany is not allowing me to work my notice."

Workers will strike for three days on 24-26 January, for 24 hours on 30 January, followed by a week-long strike from 8-14 February.

**Strikes will also be accompanied by a work to rule from 24 January to 17 April.**

- Support the strike: [bit.ly/2mAtmX0](http://bit.ly/2mAtmX0)



## D00 strike escalates

**By a train driver**

**RMT guards on Merseyrail, Northern, Greater Anglia, South Western and Southern Train Operating Companies struck on 8, 10, and 12 January, as the fight against Driver Only Operation escalates.**

Guards on Northern were very solid again, and Merseyrail workers kept up their usual high standard of solidarity with the vast majority of guards supporting the strike, as well as almost all drivers, who are members of Aslef. Elsewhere the support seems to have been patchier, for example on South Western where the urban depots are solid but the outlying depots are reportedly less so.

An important factor in maintaining the strength of support was RMT's decision to make a £200 payment to every striking guard on completion of the action. This will go most of the way to wiping out the losses of pay for the two days' action that will affect most guards (by striking on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, the union ensured that all guards

on a standard shift rotation will have to strike for only two out of the three days).

Other than on Merseyrail, Aslef drivers are almost all crossing RMT picket lines. It would likely be a decisive factor if this changed, and there has been some progress on the west side of Northern, with some Aslef members turning back at the picket lines at Wigan and Liverpool Lime Street. Shamefully at Wigan, it appears that Aslef reps reacted to this by actively persuading their members to cross the line later in the week, effectively colluding with the company to break the strike.

Support for these disputes is finally picking up in the wider movement, and there is now a solidarity fund for the Merseyrail traincrew — bank details included below. This is a good start, if a bit late.

**It is vital that this is built on to keep the disputes going until they can be won.**

- Merseyrail Solidarity Fund: Unity Trust Bank 60-83-01, account number 20388537

## Crossrail electrician strikes

**By Gemma Short**

**Electricians working on the Crossrail development in London struck on Wednesday 10 January after contractor Balfour Beatty refused to pay industry standard project completion payments.**

The electricians, organised by Unite, are working on the Woolwich section of Crossrail. Workers are demanding a four week finishing bonus to be paid when they are made redundant at the end of the job. According to Unite a "finishing bonus is standard practice on comparable major projects. It allows workers to give notice on their lodging without suffering financial loss. All the electri-



cians employed at Woolwich live outside London and have had to arrange temporary accommodation while employed on Crossrail."

**Whilst this is the first official strike on the Crossrail project, various unofficial wildcat strikes have happened in response to poor health and safety, harassment of union activists, and blacklisting concerns.**





# Solidarity

For a workers' government

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## After Carillion: Nationalise all the big public contractors!

By Martin Thomas

**The labour movement should demand that not just Carillion, but all the big public service contractors, Serco, G4S, Capita, be nationalised with minimum compensation, and their public contracts brought back in-house.**

Their workers — including agency staff and formally-self-employed contractors — should be brought into union-negotiated public-sector pay and conditions, and the services should be run under the democratic control of the workers and elected public authorities.

We must demand damage limitation for Carillion workers. Carillion's public-sector contracts should be taken in-house, and its private-sector contracts taken into public ownership.

Carillion employees in social housing maintenance in Northern Ireland voted unanimously at a union meeting on 15 January to demand direct employment by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Most of Carillion's work in Northern Ireland is for the Housing Executive.

Carillion has many employees on contracts in Canada and the Middle East as well as its 19,000 in the UK: we should support the Canadian labour movement in fighting to save the jobs in Canada, and demand the British government take over the contracts in the

Middle East and run them under union-negotiated conditions.

With Carillion, this is all damage limitation. Carillion, like the other big "services companies", is different from how we usually imagine big capitalist corporations.

It has little fixed capital. It hires or leases equipment and offices, contract by contract. The wealth created by its workers' labour over the years is not crystallised into solid fixed assets which can be seized for redress. It has all already been siphoned off into dividend pay-outs and huge salaries and bonuses for the top bosses.

### CLAWED

**As much as possible should be clawed back from the Carillion bosses.**

KPMG, the giant accountancy firm that certified Carillion as in good health only months ago, should be fined or expropriated.

But what the media say is true: "the taxpayer" will have to pay much of the cost of saving the services worked by Carillion, the jobs on its contracts, the jobs in supply companies owed money by Carillion, the Carillion workers' pensions. Only, the labour movement should demand that the rich be taxed — that the rich "taxpayer", not workers, cover the costs.

The cream has been skimmed off and consumed years ago. The lessons will have been learned only if the whole system of doing public

contracts through private profiteers is ended.

"Outsourcing" has been endemic since the 1980s. Stable, often well-unionised, public-sector workforces are broken up and the workers dispersed to a variety

of contractors. Pressure on the workers to concede worse pay and conditions is kept up by periodic reallocation of the contracts.

The work is done in a cheap-skate, cost-cutting way. Generally the contractors do not face the same market pressures to get out a decent product that companies selling day-to-day to each other, or to the public, do.

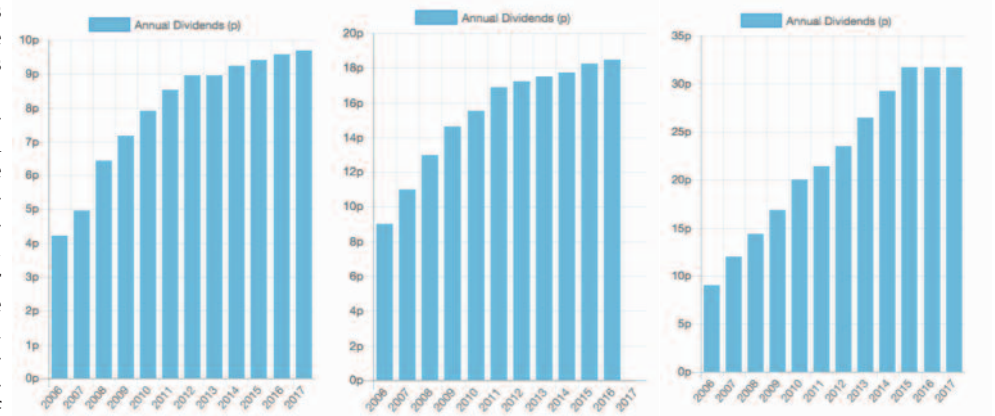
The ideological spin is that "outsourcing" means that every firm narrows down to its "core competencies", and each job is done by firms best qualified for it, rather than every firm or public enterprise doing a diverse range of operations. In fact, jobs are hived off to giant conglomerates with no "core competency" at all other than money-grabbing.

The profits are often juicy, as they have been for all the big "ser-

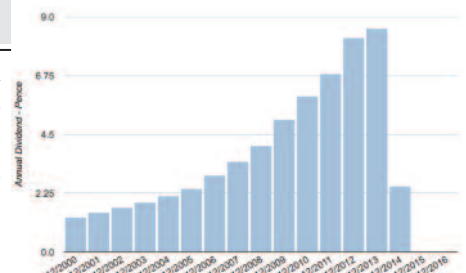
vice companies" in Britain with the PFI schemes which flourished under the New Labour government.

The Blacklist Support Group of blacklisted construction workers reports: "Carillion admitted in the High Court that they blacklisted workers who complained about safety on their building sites, while at the same time milking public sector contracts for millions... In any civilised society, these people [Carillion bosses] would be facing criminal charges.

"When you invite blacklisting human rights abusers to run the NHS and school meals, don't be surprised when vampire capitalism attempts to suck the taxpayer dry".



**G4S, Carillion, Capita, and Serco (clockwise) have all paid out more and more in dividends**



The profits are not "ploughed back" into fixed investments. A lot is paid out in dividends or in bonuses to bosses. Long-term PFI incomes, for example, are often "cashed out" quickly by selling the entitlements on to another company. The portion "ploughed back" is used to expand not by raising technology but by buying other companies, as Carillion bought up McAlpine, Mowlem, etc.

**More page 3**

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## Contact us

020 7394 8923

[solidarity@workersliberty.org](mailto:solidarity@workersliberty.org)

Write to us: The editor  
 (Cathy Nugent), 20E Tower  
 Workshops, Riley Road, London,  
 SE1 3DG

Solidarity editorial: Michael Elms,  
 Simon Nelson, Cathy Nugent  
 (editor), Gemma Short, and  
 Martin Thomas

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